

About Adult Literacy

What is literacy?

The definition of literacy has evolved over the past century. Literacy used to be defined as the ability to read and write. Over time the definition has been expanded to include the skills needed to function in the context of our environment. The National Assessment of Adult Literacy defines literacy as, "...the ability to use printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential." With technology changing our world on a daily basis, literacy becomes a moving target.

How does low literacy affect the community?

Low literacy is linked to nearly every socio-economic issue. For example, over 60% of all state and federal corrections inmates are low-literate. Low health literacy costs between \$106 billion and \$238 billion each year in the U.S. It is estimated that the effects of low literacy cost the U.S. \$225 billion or more each year in non-productivity in the workforce, crime, and loss of tax revenue due to unemployment.

What is being done to improve the literacy skills of adults?

The good news is that reading and writing are skills that can be taught with specific and direct instruction in reading and writing, which can be provided in a variety of settings. Adult schools, community colleges, and other organizations provide instruction. Literacy programs, such as the one at the Learning Center, address the needs of those learners who have not been successful in a traditional classroom setting. About one-third of adult learners have learning differences, which can be addressed through the use of creative and multi-sensory tutoring strategies. Literacy Services uses a combination of one-to-one tutoring and small-group classes to help adult learners unlock the code to reading.

Who is the adult learner?

There is no "typical" adult learner. Adult learners come from varying backgrounds and life experiences. They may be native English speakers, or speakers of other languages. Adult learners may be medical workers, tradespersons, military personnel, teacher's aides, or employed in many other professions. In the Carlsbad program, 75% of adult learners are over the age of 40, most are employed, and 22% own their own business.

Adults learners find out about Literacy Services through word-of-mouth, flyers posted at the library, referrals from social services and other community and educational agencies, print ads and articles, and through public service announcements on radio and television.

There is no time limit as to how long a learner may stay in the program as long as the learner is continuing to work on literacy goals. The literacy tutor and staff work together to transition the learner to their next education steps as the learner's skills in reading and writing improve.